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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 002856

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STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS  
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SUBJECT: DOSTUM RECONCILES WITH RIVAL, TIPS HAT TO KARZAI

REF: A. KABUL 303  
[1](#)B. KABUL 2536  
[1](#)C. KABUL 1504  
[1](#)D. KABUL 2741

Classified By: Political Counselor Alan Yu for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum apparently reconciled with adversary Akbar Bai Oct. 26, opening the door for his return to public life and jeopardizing efforts to reform his Junbesh-e-Milli party and lock the notorious Uzbek warlord out of Afghan politics. After several months of house arrest following a violent altercation with Bai, Dostum directed his loyalists to press Karzai to bring his punishment to an end with this week's staged reconciliation. If the truce holds, the government will drop or reduce criminal charges against Dostum, but Karzai's spokesmen deny the president will bring Dostum into a ministerial post. More likely, Dostum may repay the favor with support for the president's re-election.

Eight Months of House Arrest Apparently Over  
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[1](#)2. (C) In 2005, Karzai named Gen. Dostum chief of staff of the Afghan National Army, a largely ceremonial post designed to quell the Uzbek leader without ceding a serious position to him. He had been under a loosely enforced house arrest since February 2008 after ordering armed supporters to abduct and beat political rival Akbar Bai and a subsequent standoff with police (ref A). Then-Attorney General Sabit eagerly prepared criminal charges against Dostum, but the government never brought its case to trial, much to Bai's frustration. During the past several months, Dostum's allies have lobbied Karzai for his release, but the president usually demurred.

[1](#)3. (C) After Sabit's firing this summer, Karzai began hinting he was open to taking a new look at Dostum's status, probably in response to continued efforts by the opposition United Front coalition to lock up Dostum's support and influence among Uzbek voters. Meanwhile, Dostum's patrons in Turkey sent inconsistent messages regarding Dostum's status, swinging between insisting Dostum remain a part of Afghan politics to hinting they would host the general for treatment of his alcoholism (ref B).

Uzbek Allies Make Hard Sell for Release  
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¶4. (C) On Oct. 21 dozens of Uzbek elders, including provincial leaders and MPs, met with Karzai to again press their case for Dostum's release. Those present at the meeting told PolOff influential non-Uzbek MPs Haji Mohammad Mohaqqueq (Kabul, Hazara) and Ahmad Shah Ramazan (Balkh, Hazara) also attended the meeting. MP Baz Mohammad Jowzjani (Jowzjan, Arab), who has his own rivalry with Dostum, complained the meeting set the stage for a series of backroom deals designed to tie Karzai's re-election to Dostum's political survival. Jowzjani cited an alleged meeting at Dostum's house the following night where Cabinet nominees Farooq Wardak (Education) and Mohammad Hanif Atmar (Interior) agreed to approach Karzai about a release in exchange for Dostum lining up Uzbek votes in Parliament for their confirmation votes. We are tracking this and other rumors surrounding the confirmation votes on the new Cabinet members.

#### Karzai Turns to Trusted Reconciliation Expert

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¶5. (C) Word leaked Oct. 23 that Karzai had asked Upper House Speaker Sebghatullah Mojaddedi to mediate a reconciliation to end the Dostum-Bai rivalry through a traditional Afghan peace ceremony. Pressured by the high-level involvement and speed of events, Bai conceded and agreed to attend a public announcement of the reconciliation alongside Dostum at Mojaddedi's house outside of Kabul Oct. 26. The three players in the ceremony, however, presented a subdued picture to the media quite out of line with the significance of the accomplishment. Mojaddedi, recovering

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from back surgery and in generally poor health, told reporters he lacked the energy to explain the agreement in any detail. A somber-faced Dostum and Bai gave brief statements and refused to answer questions from the press. With little information coming out of the peace deal, even MPs close to Dostum said they didn't understand the exact nature of Dostum's legal status following the day's events. Despite the confusion, most believe Dostum is generally now off the hook concerning his criminal charges and house arrest.

#### A New Karzai-Dostum Alliance is Possible

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¶6. (C) Although Karzai told Bai earlier this week he had not dropped the criminal charges against Dostum, few expect the government to press forward with its case anytime soon. Karzai's advisors deny he will appoint Dostum to a Cabinet ministry -- with no formal education, Dostum would be a tough sell even without his violent history -- but Karzai's price for freedom is probably contingent on Dostum lining up more Uzbek support for the president. This would be troublesome for United Front leaders, who were counting on the roughly 10 percent of the national vote Dostum's endorsement could add to their challenge to Karzai. If Dostum has entered into an alliance with Karzai (we will investigate and report further on this rumor), it is probably multi-faceted and may also include the promotion of Dostum allies to government positions. And while he may realize a Cabinet post for himself is out of the question, Dostum could hold out for another symbolic post similar to the ANA chief of staff title he still holds.

#### Junbesh Reform Efforts Stalled

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¶7. (C) A Dostum-Karzai alliance would create problems for two reformist factions in Dostum's party, Junbesh-e-Milli. One faction, led by MP Faizullah Zaki (Jowzjan, Uzbek), hoped to gradually democratize the party and move it away from Dostum's tutelage without alienating the general, who still commands significant respect in Uzbek areas in the North. Zaki had been trying to pull the party into a solid alliance with the United Front and often represents Uzbeks in UF

executive committee meetings. But even though Zaki himself attended meetings with Karzai seeking Dostum's release, he hopes any Karzai-Dostum alliance will be tenuous enough to still allow Junbesh to throw its support behind another candidate, preferably the UF's, in next year's election. With Karzai's hands all over the reconciliation, though, it will be hard for Junbesh to distance itself too quickly from the president. Zaki and many Uzbek MPs in Junbesh have been highly critical of Karzai's government and suspicious of his recent promotions for Pashtuns to high-level government positions. If Dostum does support Karzai, Zaki's faction will either have to suspend overt cooperation with the United Front or risk facing a backlash from Dostum, a punishment he and others have personally suffered before.

18. (C) Other Junbesh leaders have also sought to distance the party from Dostum's legacy, but had already set the stage for an alliance with Karzai. Junbesh Chairman Sayed Noorullah, elected to head the party with Dostum's backing last June (ref C), recently told PolOff he dismissed the United Front as a collection of warlords unqualified to lead Afghanistan and so he would likely endorse Karzai next year. If Dostum also backs Karzai, Noorullah will lose momentum to take the party in a new direction and his own leadership of the party will suffer in Dostum's shadow. Still, Noorullah put a positive spin on the development, telling our PRT Officer in Mazar-e-Sharif the dropping of the charges against Dostum removed a stain from Junbesh's image. Noorullah also said he still expects Dostum to seek treatment in Turkey, a move he called a positive step, now that criminal charges will allow Dostum freer travel (ref D).

Dostum's Unpredictable Return to the Scene

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19. (C) Electoral math seemingly played a part in Karzai's sudden involvement in Dostum's situation. Karzai's earlier

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promises to prosecute and punish Dostum for his history of violent outbursts appear to have taken a backseat to coveting the Uzbek vote, which at 10 percent could provide the decisive margin of victory. Despite efforts by some to reform Junbesh as a democratic voice for Uzbeks in Afghanistan and take the party in a new direction, a Dostum endorsement would move the lion's share of Uzbek votes into the recipient's column. Karzai may have boosted his re-election chances with his involvement in Dostum's favor this week, but releasing Dostum risks inviting more trouble down the road given the general's violent history and unpredictable loyalty.

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